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AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA  
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI  
AMEMBASSY ASMARA  
AMEMBASSY KAMPALA

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DEPT FOR NEA/ENA AND AF/E  
NAIROBI FOR AMBASSADOR CARNEY

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [UNSC](#) [KISL](#) [SU](#) [EG](#)  
SUBJECT: EL-SADIQ EL-MAHDI ON THE FUTURE OF SUDAN  
REF: STATE 262749

11. CLASSIFIED BY DCM VINCENT BATTLE, REASON 1.5 (D).  
CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

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SUMMARY  
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12. DRAWING ON REFTTEL TALKING POINTS, DCM MET WITH EL-SADIQ EL-MAHDI IN CAIRO ON DECEMBER 30 TO DISCUSS HIS FUTURE PLANS, SUDANESE OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES, THE POLITICAL SITUATION INSIDE SUDAN, AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE (NDA). MUBARAK EL-MAHDI AND THE HEADS OF THE UMMA PARTY'S CAIRO AND ASMARA OFFICES WERE ALSO PRESENT. DISCOUNTING THE POSSIBILITY OF A MILITARY VICTORY FOR THE NDA, EL-MAHDI ASSERTED THAT A CONCERTED CAMPAIGN OF INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE ON THE NIF, COMBINED WITH ACTIVE, MATERIAL SUPPORT FOR THE OPPOSITION, WAS THE KEY TO BRINGING DOWN THE NIF GOVERNMENT WITH MINIMAL VIOLENCE. HE ARGUED THAT SUCH A CAMPAIGN WOULD DEMORALIZE THE GOVERNMENT AND DEEPEN EXTANT DIVISIONS WITHIN THE NIF, WHILE ENCOURAGING OPPOSITION FORCES INSIDE SUDAN. IN THIS REGARD, HE SUPPORTED OFFERING A "SOFT LANDING" FOR NIF LEADERS, ANTICIPATING THAT SUCH A PROPOSITION WOULD FURTHER PROMOTE DISSENSION IN THE NIF RANKS.

13. WHILE RECOGNIZING THAT MANY COUNTRIES, EGYPT INCLUDED, WERE RELUCTANT TO ASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH THE NDA'S POLICY OF VIOLENT OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT, HE OBSERVED THAT THE MILITARY CAMPAIGN WAS ONLY ONE ASPECT OF THE SUDANESE OPPOSITION'S PLAN TO BRING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT. HE ARGUED THAT THE NIF THROUGH ITS POLICY OF JIHAD WAS PROMOTING INSTABILITY IN THE REGION, AND SUDAN'S NEIGHBORS MUST RESPOND.

14. REGARDING THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, EL-MAHDI AVOWED THAT INTERNAL SUPPORT FOR THE CORE BELIEFS OF THE NIF WAS ERODING, AND DEEP SCHISMS WERE DEVELOPING BETWEEN ELEMENTS OF THE NIF. HE EXPECTED A POPULAR UPRISING TO OCCUR IN THE NEAR FUTURE, AND PREDICTED SUPPORT FOR SUCH AN UPRISING FROM THE ARMY AND POLICE FORCES, CITING MANY RECENT EXAMPLES OF DISAFFECTION WITHIN THE SECURITY FORCES TOWARDS THE GOVERNMENT. ON HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NDA, HE WAS EXTREMELY POSITIVE ABOUT THE PRINCIPLES OUTLINED IN THE ASMARA DECLARATION AND IMPRESSED WITH GARANG'S DEVELOPMENT FROM A MILITARY LEADER INTO A GENUINE POLITICAL PLAYER. HE EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT WITH THE RESTORATION OF LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT IN KHARTOUM WOULD ALSO COME PEACE AND NATIONAL UNITY. END SUMMARY.

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SUDAN'S PROBLEMS HAVE BECOME THE WORLD'S CONCERN  
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15. EL-MAHDI BEGAN HIS COMMENTS BY STATING THAT THE CURRENT REGIME IN KHARTOUM HAS INTERNATIONALIZED THE INTERNAL PROBLEMS OF SUDAN. BY SPONSORING AND ENCOURAGING ORGANIZATIONS DEDICATED TO THE VIOLENT OVERTHROW OF LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENTS WITHIN THE ARAB AND ISLAMIC WORLDS, THE NIF HAD THREATENED THE STABILITY OF THESE COUNTRIES AND FORCED THE WORLD TO BECOME INVOLVED. HE ARGUED THAT IT WAS THEREFORE UNACCEPTABLE FOR COUNTRIES IN SUDAN'S NEIGHBORHOOD, EGYPT AMONG THEM, TO SIT BACK AND DO NOTHING WHILE THE NIF ENGAGED IN POLICIES OF JIHAD. HE REALIZED THAT SOME COUNTRIES DID NOT WANT TO ASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH THE MILITARY GOALS OF THE SUDANESE OPPOSITION. HOWEVER, HE OBSERVED, THIS WAS NOT THE ONLY PROCESS THROUGH WHICH THE OPPOSITION HOPED TO INSTIGATE CHANGE.

16. REGARDING HIS OWN ATTITUDE TOWARD THE NDA'S POLICY OF VIOLENT OPPOSITION, EL-MAHDI NOTED THAT VIOLENCE WAS "PART AND PARCEL OF THE REGIME'S OWN INITIATIVES." IT WAS NATURAL, THEREFORE, THAT SOME SUDANESE WILL MEET FIRE WITH FIRE. HE PREDICTED, HOWEVER, THAT MILITARY OPPOSITION WOULD NOT SUCCEED IN OVERTHROWING THE NIF GOVERNMENT ON ITS OWN. HE ARGUED THAT ALL PARTIES INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT ANTICIPATED THAT THIS WOULD COME ABOUT THROUGH A SPONTANEOUS, NATIONAL UPRISING. SUCH AN UPRISING WOULD BE SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE, DESPITE LARGE-SCALE PURGES AND FORCED RETIREMENTS WITHIN THE ARMY AND POLICE, THERE REMAINED A STRONG "NATIONAL CHARACTER" WITHIN THESE FORCES WHICH OPPOSED THE NIF. THIS "WILL DECIDE THE ISSUE IN FAVOR OF AN UPRISING."

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LOYALTY OF SECURITY FORCES  
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17. WHEN ASKED TO CITE EXAMPLES OF THIS NATIONALIST THREAD WITHIN THE ARMY AND POLICE, EL-MAHDI OBSERVED THAT THERE HAVE BEEN SIX ARMY COUP ATTEMPTS IN THE LAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS, REFLECTING AN OBVIOUS UNEASINESS WITHIN THE ARMY REGARDING THE NIF. FURTHERMORE, DURING INTERROGATION THE OFFICERS INVOLVED REFUSED TO DISASSOCIATE THEMSELVES FROM THE COUPS, OPENLY DEFYING THE REGIME AND DEMANDING CHANGE. HE ALSO CORROBORATED OTHER REPORTS THAT THE POLICE REFUSED TO INTERVENE DURING POPULAR DEMONSTRATIONS IN SEPTEMBER, FORCING NIF MILITIAS TO CRACK DOWN ON THE DEMONSTRATORS.

18. HE POINTED TO PERIODIC FORCED RETIREMENTS OF POLICE AND SOLDIERS AS EVIDENCE OF INSECURITY WITHIN THE REGIME REGARDING THE LOYALTY OF THESE FORCES. FINALLY, HE RELATED AN ANECDOTE RECOUNTED BY THE MESSENGER HE HAD ENTRUSTED TO DELIVER HIS FAREWELL LETTERS OF CRITICISM TO GENERAL OMAR BASHIR AND HASAN EL-TURABI. UPON RECEIVING THESE LETTERS FROM THE MESSENGER, THE ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF INQUIRED IF EL-MAHDI HAD ESCAPED SAFELY. WHEN INFORMED THAT HE HAD, THE CHIEF OF STAFF REPORTEDLY SAID "AL-HAMDUL'ILLAH (PRAISE GOD)." EL-MAHDI ASSERTED THAT THESE WERE NOT EXAMPLES OF AD HOC REACTIONS; RATHER, THERE WAS AN ORGANIZED REPRESENTATION OF AN ANTI-NIF VIEW WITHIN THE ARMY AND POLICE.

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INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE THE KEY TO PEACEFUL CHANGE  
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19. DURING EL-MAHDI'S DISCUSSIONS WITH THE DCM, HE REPEATEDLY RETURNED TO THE LEITMOTIF THAT INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE WAS INDUCING PSYCHIC CHANGE WITHIN THE NIF GOVERNMENT. EVERY EVENT WHICH HIGHLIGHTED THE FAILURE OF THE NIF REGIME OR SUPPORT FOR THE SUDANESE PEOPLE VICE THE GOVERNMENT WAS

DECREASING THE MORALE OF THE GOVERNMENT AND INCREASING THAT OF THE OPPOSITION. THIS, IN TURN, WAS EXACERBATING EXISTING SCHISMS WITHIN THE NIF ESTABLISHMENT.

¶10. HE THEREFORE ENCOURAGED EXTERNAL PRESSURE OF EVERY SORT ON THE REGIME. HE BELIEVED THESE PRESSURES WOULD CREATE "THE CUMULATIVE AFFECT WE ARE SEEKING," FURTHER DIVIDING THE GOVERNMENT AND BRINGING IT CLOSER TO DISSOLUTION. EL-MAHDI EMPHASIZED THAT THIS POLICY REPRESENTED THE GREATEST HOPE FOR NON-VIOLENT CHANGE WITHIN SUDAN. IN RESPONSE TO THE DCM'S INQUIRY ABOUT THE NATURE OF PRESSURES OUTSIDERS COULD EXERT, HE CITED THE HARDENING ATTITUDES OF THE FRONT LINE STATES AND PRESSURE FROM OTHERS IN THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITY ON DEVELOPMENT (IGAD) TO RESTORE PEACE AND DEMOCRACY IN SUDAN AS EXAMPLES OF SUCH CUMULATIVE PRESSURE.

¶11. IN THIS REGARD, HE HOPED TO ENCOURAGE THE PARTICIPATION OF ARAB STATES SURROUNDING SUDAN IN THIS POLICY, SPECIFICALLY CITING EGYPT, LIBYA AND SAUDI ARABIA. HE SUGGESTED, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THEY JOIN THE FRIENDS OF IGAD. HE ALSO PROPOSED THAT ANY LEADER AMONG THE IGAD MEMBERS COULD ORGANIZE A SUMMIT TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE OF REGIONAL STABILITY AND FOCUS A SPOTLIGHT ON SUDAN'S DESTABILIZING ACTIVITIES. HE ALSO AGREED WITH THE DCM THAT IMPLEMENTATION OF UNSC SANCTIONS AGAINST SUDAN WAS A POWERFUL TOOL FOR BRINGING PRESSURE TO BEAR ON SUDAN, NOTING THAT THE MORE THE REGIME WAS ISOLATED AND PUNISHED FOR ITS ACTIONS, THE MORE PRESSURE WILL ACCUMULATE. HE STATED THAT HE INTENDS TO EXPRESS THESE VIEWS IN HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH EGYPTIAN OFFICIALS.

¶12. FINALLY, HE EXPRESSED FRUSTRATION WITH THE LACK OF INTERNATIONAL MATERIAL SUPPORT FOR THE SUDANESE OPPOSITION, CLAIMING THAT IT WAS AMONG THE LEAST WELL FUNDED OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS IN THE WORLD. HE NOTED THAT THERE IS A SENSE IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY THAT SUDAN HAS BEEN ISOLATED BY UNSC SANCTIONS AND DIPLOMATIC CONDEMNATION. HE ARGUED THAT THIS IS UNTRUE: SUDAN RECEIVED ACTIVE SUPPORT FROM MANY PARTIES, INCLUDING IRAN, IRAQ, QATAR, AND WEALTHY INDIVIDUAL ARABS (IN ADDITION TO OSAMA BIN LADEN) WHO AGREE WITH ITS POLITICAL AGENDA. THIS SUPPORT CAN ONLY BE NEUTRALIZED BY COMPARABLE SUPPORT TO THE OPPOSITION.

¶13. THE DCM AGREED WITH THE NEED TO INFLUENCE THE NIF BY EXERTING "CALIBRATED" PRESSURE. AT THE SAME TIME, THE US MAINTAINS AN ACTIVE DIALOGUE WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF SUDAN TO DISCUSS ITS BEHAVIOR BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD. EL-MAHDI ENCOURAGED THIS DIALOGUE, NOTING THAT IT WAS VITALLY IMPORTANT TO CLARIFY THE ISSUES. HE RECOGNIZED THAT THE US POSITION WAS NOT ANTI-ISLAMIC, NOR WERE WE SUPPORTING SOUTHERN SECESSION. RATHER, THE US WAS CONCERNED WITH HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY. HE ARGUED THAT THE NIF WAS PRESENTING US POLICY IN A NEGATIVE LIGHT AND TWISTING THE FACTS TO CLOUD THE ISSUES. EL-MAHDI ALSO SUPPORTED WHAT HE CHARACTERIZED AS US EFFORTS TO PROMOTE A "SOFT LANDING" FOR THE NIF, BELIEVING THAT ENCOURAGING SUCH AN OUTCOME WOULD FURTHER INCREASE DISSENSION WITHIN NIF RANKS.

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IS THE NIF IMPLODING?  
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¶14. REFERRING TO ALLEGED SCHISMS WITHIN THE NIF, THE DCM INQUIRED ABOUT THE NATURE OF THESE SCHISMS AND EVIDENCE THAT THEY WERE DEVELOPING. EL-MAHDI STATED THAT A DEEP DIVISION HAD DEVELOPED BETWEEN PRAGMATISTS, WHO PERCEIVED THE FAILURE OF THE NIF EXPERIMENT AND BELIEVED THAT THE NIF SHOULD

ACKNOWLEDGE THIS FAILURE; AND THE "DOCTRINAIRES," WHO FEARED THAT ADMITTING ANY FAILURE WOULD DEMONSTRATE WEAKNESS AND BRING DOWN THE REGIME.

¶15. HE CITED THE RECENT DEBATE OVER THE BUDGET AS AN EXAMPLE OF THIS DIVISION. ROUGHLY ONE THIRD OF CURRENT BUDGET OUTLAYS INVOLVE TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR "PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATIONS," WHICH ARE IN REALITY NIF BUSINESSES INVOLVED IN FINANCING PRO-GOVERNMENT POLITICAL AND SECURITY ACTIVITIES AND ARE RIFE WITH CORRUPTION. THE CURRENT MINISTER OF FINANCE, AN NIF PRAGMATIST, REALIZED THAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD NOT FUNCTION WITH SUCH A BUDGET AND DEMANDED THAT THE EXEMPTIONS BE ELIMINATED. A RAGING DEBATE ENSUED WITH HARD-LINERS, WHO FEARED THAT ELIMINATING THE EXEMPTIONS WOULD UNDERMINE THE REGIME. TO DATE THIS ISSUE IS UNRESOLVED. SCHISMS HAD ALSO ERUPTED REGARDING NORMALIZATION WITH EGYPT AND OTHER FRONT-LINE STATES, AS WELL AS THE ROLE OF THE ARMY VICE THE POPULAR DEFENSE FORCES. AS A RESULT OF THESE SCHISMS, SOME LEADERS WITHIN THE NIF HAD BEGUN TO STATE OPENLY THAT SUDAN MUST EMBRACE POLITICAL PLURALITY, NORMALIZE RELATIONS WITH HER NEIGHBORS, AND OPEN A DIALOGUE WITH THE OPPOSITION. EL-MAHDI STRESSED THAT THE MORE EXTERNAL PRESSURE WAS BROUGHT TO BEAR, THE MORE THESE SCHISMS WOULD GROW.

¶16. TURNING AGAIN TO THE UNSC SANCTIONS, EL-MAHDI STATED THAT, PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE, HE HAD BEEN ENCOURAGING THE GOVERNMENT TO COME UP WITH CREATIVE WAYS TO ADDRESS THE CONCERNS OF THE UN. HE ARGUED THAT THE THREE ACCUSED OF ATTEMPTING TO ASSASSINATE PRESIDENT MUBARAK WERE SYMPTOMS, NOT THE CAUSE OF SUDAN'S PROBLEMS. RATHER THAN FOCUSING ON THESE INDIVIDUALS AND INSISTING THAT THEY WERE NO LONGER INSIDE SUDAN, EL-MAHDI HAD ARGUED THAT THE GOS OFFER CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES TO THE UN DEMONSTRATING THEIR COMMITMENT TO COMBATING TERRORISM AND RESPECTING HUMAN RIGHTS. SUCH CBMS SHOULD INCLUDE DISMANTLING THE TERRORISM INFRASTRUCTURE AND DISCUSSING WHY THIS APPARATUS EXISTED.

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ARMY REFUSES TO ENGAGE NDA  
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¶17. REFERRING TO REPORTS ON BBC RADIO ON 12/30 THAT AN UPRISING HAD ERUPTED NEAR THE BORDER CITY OF KASSALA, THE DCM REQUESTED FURTHER INFORMATION. WHILE UNAWARE OF THE INCIDENT, MUBARAK EL-MAHDI BROKE IN TO SAY THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN FOCUSING ITS EFFORTS IN THIS AREA DUE TO THE PRESENCE OF NDA FORCES INSIDE THE SUDANESE BORDER, AND HAD RECENTLY SENT A BRIGADE TO OUST THE NDA FROM THE REGION. THE BRIGADE HAD ALLEGEDLY CONDUCTED GHOST MANEUVERS IN THE AREA, REFUSING TO ENGAGE THE NDA WHILE REPORTING TO KHARTOUM THAT THE OPPOSITION FORCES HAD RETREATED INSIDE ERITREA. HE DID NOT KNOW IF THERE WAS A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THESE EVENTS AND THE REPORTED UNREST.

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TRAVEL PLANS: CAMPAIGN FOR SUPPORT  
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¶18. TURNING TO HIS FUTURE PLANS, EL-MAHDI STATED THAT HE HOPES TO TRAVEL SOON TO SAUDI ARABIA AND THEN BACK TO ERITREA. IN THE NEAR TERM HE HOPED TO VISIT OTHER FRONT-LINE STATES. ULTIMATELY, HE INTENDED TO VISIT THE US (ONCE THE NEW CABINET WAS CONFIRMED AND SWORN IN), THE UK, AND OTHER EU NATIONS TO ELICIT MATERIAL SUPPORT FOR THE OPPOSITION. NOTING THAT EL-MAHDI HAD MENTIONED LIBYA AS A POSSIBLE SUPPORTER OF THE OPPOSITION CAUSE, THE DCM QUESTIONED WHETHER LIBYA COULD INDEED PLAY A POSITIVE ROLE. EL-MAHDI AGREED THAT LIBYA HAD OF LATE BEEN MORE A HINDRANCE

THAN A HELP, OBSERVING THAT LIBYA HAD BEEN PROVIDING DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT FOR THE NIF. HOWEVER, HE ALSO OBSERVED THAT THE NIF HAD REPAID THE FAVOR BY SUPPORTING RADICAL LIBYAN ORGANIZATIONS OPPOSED TO THE GOVERNMENT. HE EXPRESSED OPTIMISM THAT LIBYA WOULD ULTIMATELY ALIGN ITSELF WITH THE EGYPTIAN POSITION, WHATEVER THAT TURNED OUT TO BE.

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RELATIONS WITH NDA, GARANG  
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¶19. EL-MAHDI ASSERTED THAT THE ASMARA DECLARATION WAS "ONE OF THE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE SUDANESE OPPOSITION." THE FORMATION OF THE NDA REPRESENTED TWO IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS: A) AGREEMENT BY ALL PARTIES ON BASIC PRINCIPLES; AND, B) A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE NORTHERN OPPOSITION AND THE SPLM ON A FUTURE FRAMEWORK FOR PEACE IN SUDAN. IN THE LAST TWO UPRISINGS AGAINST DICTATORSHIPS IN SUDAN, IN 1964 AND 1985, THE REGIMES WERE TOPPLED BUT THE CIVIL WAR CONTINUED. EL-MAHDI EXPRESSED OPTIMISM THAT, BASED ON THIS ALLIANCE, FOR THE FIRST TIME SUDAN COULD SEE BOTH DEMOCRACY AND PEACE AT THE SAME TIME.

¶20. AS FOR HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH JOHN GARANG, EL-MAHDI NOTED THAT HE HAS ONLY MET GARANG TWICE, ONCE IN 1986 AND AGAIN LAST WEEK. HE COMMENTED ON A REMARKABLE EVOLUTION IN GARANG'S PERSONA IN THE INTERIM PERIOD. WHILE IN 1986 GARANG WAS FOCUSED SOLELY ON THE MILITARY STRUGGLE, HE HAS BECOME MULTIDIMENSIONAL, WITH A STRONG COMMAND OF THE DIPLOMATIC AND POLITICAL ELEMENTS OF HIS POSITION.

¶21. ASMARA - MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.

WALKER